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SUBJECT: MANDERA LAUNCH OF KENYA-SOMALIA CROSS-BORDER
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO INCLUDE ETHIOPIAN
STAKEHOLDERS

Reftel: NAIROBI 04639

¶1. USAID/East Africa representatives, accompanied by representatives of USAID contractor Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), recently visited Kenya's conflict-prone northeast province of Mandera. The two-night, three-day trip culminated in an event to launch the expansion of the Kenya-Somalia cross-border conflict management program which began in 2004 to now include Ethiopian stakeholders as well.

¶2. This program highlights the hybrid forms of governance which have been emerging in ungoverned and under-governed spaces throughout Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia, namely the mediated state (reftel). This model involves collaboration between state actors (district commissioners) and local civil society organizations functioning as peace committees which bring together clan elders, women's and youth organizations and local NGOs. In the absence of a strong state presence, collaboration between the state representatives and the local peace committees provides a structure for early warning, community level response, and reconciliation of conflicts within the affected districts and in many cases conflicts which involve actors across the border.

¶3. Background

The Mandera Triangle region comprises of the Gedo region in Somalia, the Doolow region in Ethiopia, and the Mandera district in Kenya. The social groups involved include the major Somali and bilingual Somali-Oromo clans of the Gabaweyn (Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia), the Degodia (Kenya and Ethiopia), the Murrule (Kenya), the Marehan (Somalia), and the Garre (Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia), as well as the other Somali- and Oromo-speaking clans. These groups, who together form the populations of Mandera, Doolow and Gedo districts, are closely linked by geography and a shared social system, by religious and clan ties, and by commercial links and interests that stretch deep into the border areas of the three countries and beyond.

¶4. Because the people of the Mandera Triangle are largely pastoralists, water and grazing rights are often a source of conflict. Events outside local control such as the unfolding events in Somalia, drought and other natural disasters, or political competition among various clans (such as with the upcoming national elections) have the potential to heighten tensions. Livestock raiding and other forms of banditry are common and have in the past escalated into clan-based cycles of violence.

¶5. Weak state control or lack of a central state in Somalia's case has meant that functions which would usually be undertaken by central authority have devolved to local actors in Gedo, Doolow, and Mandera. In all three regions, security has been enhanced by promoting informal and traditional mechanisms of conflict mitigation under the rubric of peace committees composed of local officials and civil society organizations.

¶6. The formal launch of the new phase of USAID/EA's project was a chance to formalize relationships that have been ongoing in the Mandera Triangle since 2004. Despite the Government of Kenya's (GOK) official policy of sealing the border, Ethiopian officials and Gedo officials have been regularly meeting with the Mandera DC and other stakeholders in the cross-border work.

¶7. Cross-border peace work from the Mandera perspective

Within Mandera district, local peace structures have been evolving since USAID/Kenya and USAID/East Africa began their support in 2004. What began as a peace committee centered on Mandera Town and initiated by three stakeholder groups--Women for Peace, Elders for Peace, and Youth for Peace--has evolved in to a district-wide committee representing not only Mandera Town, but the other 17 locations within the district as well. Two elders representing each of the Mandera locations, and 4 representing the town (the 2 additional seats ensure that all 4 major clans within

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the town are represented), constitute the Mandera District Peace Committee (MDPC). The GOK's representative in Mandera, the District Commissioner (DC), has been a key champion of the MDPC's work and serves as the committee's chair.

¶8. Through the new formation, the MDPC elders report being able to better respond to conflicts throughout the district. Mandera Town and its livestock market was previously a flashpoint for conflict. However, the establishment of a 'peace market' in the town with area designated as the tribunal for MDPC members to officially mediate conflicts has helped reduce the number of conflicts centered on the town. Currently, outlying areas of the district are experiencing more violence, banditry, and livestock raiding, and often the perpetrators live across the border in Ethiopia and Somalia. Local clan elders in affected areas are trained by the MDPC and provide the first-immediate response. Their representatives on the MDPC are able to report incidents and activate a wider response capability, including communicating with their cross-border partners when necessary. Elders reported a number of incidents in which the cross-border network allowed cattle raided in one area in the Eastern part of Mandera to be retrieved from areas in Ethiopia. Similarly, elders attributed the dialogue that the cross-border program has fostered between the MDPC and its partners in Gedo as being a key factor in helping to mitigate the effects of instability in Somalia from spilling over in to Mandera.

¶9. The Mandera DC's ongoing participation in the peace building work has been instrumental in helping him carry out his official duties and to maintain peace in the region. He recognized the effectiveness of deferring to the MDPC to help solve disputes between the populations of the three districts. Using traditional means involving negotiated settlements between clans, rather than individual prosecutions

through the criminal justice system, has proven more effective at preventing isolated incidents from escalating.

¶10. Comments

Local capacity, particularly in Mandera and Gedo, to deal with small incidents of conflict is promising. Though peace building efforts in Doolow are new, the commitment of local authorities and civil society stakeholders is strong. However, USAID/Kenya partner, Practical Action, which also does peace work in Mandera, questioned whether the MDPC has the capacity to deal with potential tensions associated with the upcoming Kenya national elections. Competition for parliamentary seats has already led to a resurgence of clan identity which will likely be exploited by candidates vying for office.

¶11. The GOK's National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management has developed a draft national policy on conflict management and peace building. However, the finalization of the policy has been delayed. USAID partner DAI stressed the need for such a policy in all three countries to institutionalize and clarify the structures of local peace committees with which the central government will engage, which will in turn mitigate the potential for the peace committees themselves to become a source of conflict.

¶12. In Mandera, MDPC members recognized the growing pains in evolving from a town-based organization to a district-wide organization. In particular, various groups conferred legitimacy on the new arrangements depending on whether they felt more or less represented, and had better or worse access to external, donor resources used to support peace building. These issues will continue to arise and USAID recognizes their role in helping to coordinate the many peace actors working in the Mandera district as well as across borders. RANNEBERGER